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THE MUSICAL AMATEUR



ON PIANO-PLAYING.



THREE things go to make a perfect piano-player; three things, that is, outside of God-given talent, which cannot be acquired. These three things are "tone," "velocity," and "clearness." From a long and careful study of the great pianists who have visited our coun-

try, I have come to the conclusion that any two of these can be acquired, but that the three together are never found, and are perhaps unattainable. Rubinstein had "tone" and "velocity," but not "clearness;" Von Bülow, "velocity" and "clearness," but not "tone;" Essipoff, the same as Von Bülow; Rummel, the same as Rubinstein (whom as a pianist he greatly resembles); Joseffy, the same as Von Bülow (with the addition of poetry, which Von Bülow lacked); our own S. B. Mills has "tone" and "clearness," but not "velocity." I have been vehemently fought by Mills' friends on this latter statement, but it is easily susceptible of proof. Let any one metronomize a composition performed by Joseffy, for example, and the same as rendered by Mills; and it will be found that Mills is from one seventh to one fifth slower in his "tempi" than Joseffy. Mills' large "tone" deceives the ear into believing that he uses more velocity than he does; it so fills the air and binds the notes of a passage together that it produces the impression of velocity without the fact.

Of course, in using the terms "tone," "velocity," and "clearness," I use them in their most extreme sense; I mean in each case the acme of "tone," of "velocity," of "clearness." And when I say that even a great pianist can have but two of the three, I mean he can have but two in perfection; he would be no great pianist if he had not also a large proportion of the third element.

Now, our amateur pianists usually make the mistake of sacrificing all things to "velocity;" the exceptions are rare. And in their strivings after this end, "tone" suffers considerably, and "clearness" is generally sacrificed entirely.

The causes of this fault are various. First in order comes, undoubtedly, the abominable work dignified by the name of "teaching," and doled out to misguided pupils at starvation rates by a crowd of needy men and women, either untaught themselves or careless of their pupils. The finest teacher in the world could not afford to undergo the nerve and brain wear necessarily resulting from honest and analytical teaching for the eight, ten, or fifteen dollars per quarter charged by these worse than charlatans. Worse, because hopeless; and hopeless because their very

ignorance makes it impossible to show them that they are ignorant. Next comes the generally received impression that a cheap teacher and cheap instrument (and "cheap" in both these cases means always "bad") will do for a pupil to begin with. It seems impossible to make people see that the beginning is the very time when the best of both should be provided. As well might one undertake to erect a good house upon a bad foundation as to make a good player out of one badly taught at the commencement. If a good teacher is a luxury which can only be indulged in for a short time, by all means have that luxury to start with. After eight or ten quarters from a really good teacher, the pupil should be able to continue with comparatively little assistance; at any rate, a good position of fingers, hands, and arms will by that time have become so much a second nature that the pupil will be in little danger of losing it. As for the instrument, there are enough difficulties in the path of a beginner without unnecessarily increasing them by providing him with bad material to work on. The first steps in piano-playing are heart-breaking and patience-trying enough under the most advantageous circumstances, and it is the height of folly to make them more so.

A third cause may be found in the unwise impatience of the parents and friends of the pupil; and the better and more thorough the teacher, the more he will suffer from this. This is a point on which I speak feelingly, for I have gone through many a disagreeable experience from this cause alone. At one time I became roused to such a pitch of determination by unwise interference and complaints that I refused to accept any beginner unless bound to me for three years; and the few who accepted this condition found no cause for complaint when the stipulated time had passed. Parents and friends very naturally cannot see either the intention or the results of continued scale and exercise practice. "Susan Smith plays the 'Maiden's Prayer,' and she has only had two quarters' lessons; my child has been studying a year and you give her only one or two pieces, and they are so easy that there is no show about them." It is in vain that the teacher responds that he does not want his pupil to play the "Maiden's Prayer," and that if he did he would not give it to her yet, for she is not ready for it. In vain does he point out that the simple pieces his pupil plays are performed with finish, with good tone and in good taste, whereas Miss Smith's execution of the "Maiden's Prayer" is truly an "execution" in the wrong sense of the word. All this the parent cannot see. Miss Smith makes a show and her child does not. What is the teacher to do? If he be a poor man, whose bread and butter depend upon the immediate pecuniary results of his teaching, he must give way; the pupil is spoilt, the teacher misjudged by those who know, and the parent beholds the ruin of what might have been a good pianist with satisfaction and pride.

A fourth cause lies in the pupils themselves. As I have already said, the beginnings of a proper study of the piano are tiring, uninteresting, and exacting; and the student has frequently to spend weeks on studies the use or aim of which he cannot be made to understand. As a natural consequence they are slighted, or entirely neglected, while the pupil scrambles through the more melodious of his exercises, or through pieces surreptitiously obtained and carefully hidden from the knowledge of the teacher, who, unless he has had experience enough to open his eyes to this favorite deception of impatient pupils, wonders how it is that his carefully taught and apparently industrious scholar makes such very slow progress. Here is where the parent *should* step in and give to the teacher the aid of his influence.

A pupil must frequently be content to study in faith a great deal of which he cannot at present see the use. It is not interesting nor amusing to spend every day fifty minutes in slowly and patiently raising a single finger and letting it fall over and over again;

carefully watching at each repetition the position of the hand and arm and the action and continued flexibility of the muscles. Yet this is a necessary—an indispensable—study. Five minutes on each finger of each hand makes fifty minutes; and at least five minutes should be spent on each finger.

Five-finger exercises, scale practice, and octave practice contain the elements of all good piano-playing; but they are all very uninteresting until a pupil has got far enough to analyze and appreciate his own gradual improvement. Until that time arrives, he must be content to do them as a necessary but unpalatable bit of daily labor.

Finally, and above all things, practise slowly, *very* slowly. No matter how rapidly a composition is intended to be performed, the practice on it must be slow; indeed, the more rapid the intended performance, the slower and more carefully analytic must be the preliminary practice. It is from the neglect of this important rule that we get the muddy runs, uneven passages, and weak trills of our great body of amateur pianists. It is needless to say that every mark of "forte" or "piano," "accelerando" or "ritardando," accent or pause, made by the composer must be rigidly obeyed. *First* get these so thoroughly practised into your piece with the notes that you unconsciously obey them as you play; *then* form your conception of the composition, incorporating these marks; and, if Heaven has intended you for a tone-poet, your performance will then be one of those which make of music a language at once too beautiful and too definite for words.

C. F.



WITHOUT doubt there is considerable dissatisfaction with the Mapleson operatic troupe this year; bitter complaints are made that the public are asked to pay "Nilsson prices" for inferior singers. Why "Nilsson" prices? This complaint shows the wide misapprehension that

obtains here on all musical matters. It is undoubtedly quite true that there is no artist in the troupe as sensationally attractive as the much over-appreciated Mme. Nilsson of some seasons ago, or the equally overrated Mme. Gerster of last year; but an opera cannot be honestly represented by any one person, or two, any more than a fine and just performance of a great orchestral work could be given with one good first violin and a surrounding of botchers who can hardly hold their instruments. The "star" business is not only overdone: it should never be done at all—at least in so high a branch of art as opera.

* * *

The company now at the Academy of Music is one well fitted to give opera in a manner thoroughly satisfactory to every musician and to every judicious person; for it is able to give that most important of all points, a perfect *ensemble*. The principals (with, perhaps, one exception) are artistic, painstaking, and fully up to the requirements of every part yet entrusted to them; the seconds are as good as the principals who supported the much-quoted Nilsson; some of them are indeed better, as witness Mme. Lablache, and the chorus and orchestra are excellent in material, thoroughly well trained, and under most competent conductorship. Rehearsals are not spared,

and the concerted music is consequently given in a concerted style—a point never attained here before save by Mapleson's company last year, and Miss Gertrude Corbett's three and a half years ago. Each opera, as presented, becomes for the listener a complete whole; not a succession of scenes in which one or two persons occasionally appear and astonish the public as a relief to a painful stream of incapable endeavors. As a consequence, it is now possible to witness an opera which shall be a steady climax from overture to fall of curtain, when the composer has taken proper care so to write it; and the result is infinitely more artistic and satisfactory than could be the badly supported efforts of the one or two finest and greatest artists in the world.

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There is one possible ground of dissatisfaction with Mapleson's company, though it is hardly one which would occur to the general public or be felt as a serious fault, even if recognized. It is this: Satisfactory as the company is within certain limits, it *has* its limits, and they are rather narrow. It is capable of giving well all the older school of operas, and even the more modern ones up to "Carmen," and, perhaps, "Aida;" but there it must stop. The really modern operas (in style, not chronological order of production), those of Wagner, of Rubinstein, of Goldmark, must never be attempted by the Mapleson troupe. With the exceptions of Campanini and Mme. Lablache, and (possibly) Mlle. Valleria, there are in it no singers who are musically (not vocally) fitted to cope with these. The attempted performances of "Lohengrin" last season fully proved this. All the singers but Campanini and Lablache were over-weighted—Gerster was completely crushed—the chorus had evidently much more than it could grapple, and even Ardit, good conductor as he is, showed that he was out of his element, and occasionally floundered about beyond his depth. But so long as the company sticks to the work for which it is fitted, the public will find no cause to complain that it does not receive full value for the money asked of it.

* * *

Mr. Mapleson's troubles with his orchestra are an additional proof (if any were required) of the utter lack of ordinary business principles and even of honesty in the main body of our German musicians. They had, in the first place, no right to sign the contracts they did, if, as they assert, they were against the rules of the tyrannical society to which they are forced to belong; but, having signed them, they had then no right to refuse at the last moment to fulfil them, and thus to force Mr. Mapleson either to agree to their suddenly increased demands or give up his advertised performance. The musicians throw the blame on the society, the society on the musicians. Meanwhile manager, conductor, and public suffer. The opera of "Linda" had to be given the other night without flutes, because, although the flutes were there and had received precisely the same satisfaction as the other members of the orchestra who did play, they refused to go into the orchestra until other demands of theirs were complied with. They doubtless thought that they were doing a brilliant and safe thing, as "Linda" is an opera in which the flutes are of unusual importance. But Ardit proved himself equal to the emergency (no small or ordinary one), and took the performance through safely and satisfactorily without these two important gentlemen.

* * *

It is amusing to see how Mapleson's orchestra musicians have, so to speak, cut their own throats by their late action in the contract and salary matter. They were, according to their contracts, to receive some thirty, and some thirty-five, dollars per week, no matter how many or how few opera performances were given. Under their new understanding they receive seven dollars for each performance. As the ordinary number of opera performances per week is four, it needs no great arithmetical skill to discover that they will now receive only twenty-eight dollars in place of the thirty or thirty-five they would have had had they been honorable enough to keep the engagement they had voluntarily made.

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By the time this number reaches our readers Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan, of "Pinafore" fame,

D'Oyley Carte (their manager), and the English "Pinafore" company will be already here, and probably at work. Those who have heard this operetta murdered and misrepresented will feel no little interest in seeing it in its original form; but they must go to the performance with the full understanding that they are going to have their previous conceptions of the work very severely upset.

* * *

Of the many ridiculous things done in "Pinafore" in this country, the most ridiculous is making "Cousin Hebe" a pretty, saucy girl. This idea was the outcome of the pitiful vanity of the actress who first took the part here. The original intention is to have "Cousin Hebe" a stiff, prim old maid, corkscrew curled and sharp featured, who clings limpet-like to "Sir Joseph"—greatly to his annoyance—and who finally worries him into marrying her.

* * *

A London paper, which is usually both careful and correct in its statements, speaking of Arthur Sullivan's visit to this country, says that, in addition to any other drawbacks which he may find here, he will have to encounter the bitter opposition of Theodore Thomas. This is excruciatingly funny. The idea that Mr. Thomas will in the slightest way notice either Mr. Sullivan (as a conductor) or his "Pinafore" is about as sensible as would be the declaration that a mouse with a bit of cheese in its mouth was in danger of being robbed by a lion in its vicinity.

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The same paper speaks of Mr. Thomas's "labors in Philadelphia, where he has been settled for the last two years." This will be news for Mr. Thomas. It is amazing how completely English writers, well informed upon other points, are at sea upon the geography of this country. A trifling discrepancy of five hundred or a thousand miles in their statements does not seem to trouble them in the least.

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It is with real regret that I note here the abandonment of the intended Chickering Symphony Soirées. The conductor, Mr. Carlberg, was—in spite of the somewhat severe criticisms bestowed upon him in certain quarters—a welcome addition to our very small list of conductors of classic music. He has an individuality of his own, and gave us some new readings of old works which were interesting and acceptable. His chief point of difference from our other conductors is his possession of a fire and passion almost Italian in intensity. I shall not readily forget the rendering of the slow movement of Mendelssohn's "Scotch Symphony" under his bâton last season; it was the first time I ever heard an orchestra "phrase" the melody as an artistic singer would have done. An insufficient subscription list is the reason given for this disappointment.

CARYL FLORIO.

RECENT MAGAZINE ART ARTICLES.

- AMERICAN ARTISTS AND AMERICAN ART. V. Wm. Wetmore. Story. Ill. Magazine of Art, Oct., 4 pp.
ART EDUCATION, INDUSTRIAL. J. J. Talbot. Penn Mo., Oct., 15 pp.
ART IN LOUISVILLE EXPOSITION. E. S. Crosier. Louisville Mag., Oct., 26 pp.
ART IN THE WORLD, THE OLDEST. W. J. Loftie. Louisville Mag., Oct., 5 pp.
ART, TALKS ON. W. M. Hunt. Dwight's Journal of Music, Sept. 27, Oct. 11, Nov. 8.
ART AND CRITICISM. S. Colvin. (Fortnightly Rev.) Appletons' Jour., Oct., 7 pp.
BUTLER, ELIZABETH ("née" Thompson). Ill. Magazine of Art, Oct., 5 pp.
CASTING IN PLASTER AMONG THE GREEKS AND ROMANS, THE ART OF. W. W. Story. International Rev., Nov., 21 pp.
CERAMICS, DECORATIVE TASTE IN. G. B. Griffith. Ill. Potter's American Mo., Oct., 12 pp.
CERAMIC CLAYS, AMERICAN. Journal of Franklin Institute, Oct.
CHRISTIAN ART. The Van Eycks; Memling; Dürer; Holbein. Catholic World, Nov., 11 pp.
CHRISTIANITY AND ART. Rev. B. Hawley. National Repository, Oct., 2 pp.
CLEANING PAINTINGS, A NEW PROCESS FOR. J. J. Jarves. Art Jour., Oct., 2 pp.
FINISH, AN UNFINISHED DISCUSSION ON. Art Jour., Oct., 4 pp.
FOURTH ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS ON CHINA. Ill. Magazine of Art, Oct., 4 pp.
FRENCH ART, THE TRADITIONS OF. M. Rondani. Revista Europea, Sept.
FURNITURE, HISTORY OF. XIII. M. Jacquemart. American Cabinet Maker, Sept. 27.
GROSVENOR GALLERY, THE. (Continued.) American Architect, Sept. 20.
JAPANESE ARTIST AT HOME, THE. W. E. Griffith. Leslie's Popular Mo., Nov.
LAMBETH PALACE, SOME PORTRAITS AT. Art Jour., Oct.
OIL PAINTS, PROPERTIES OF. Painter's Mag., Oct., 3 pp.
ORNAMENTATION OF THE HOUSEHOLD AND THE PARIS EXHIBITION. Builder, Oct. 4.
ROMANTIC ART, HEGEL ON. Ill. Destruction of the Romantic Form of Art. Journal of Speculative Philosophy, Oct., 21 pp.

ROOF DECORATION, THE ARCHITECTURAL PRINCIPLES OF. Builder, Sept. 13, 2 pp.
ROYAL SCOTTISH ACADEMY AND GLASGOW INSTITUTE EXHIBITIONS. Geo. R. Halkett. Ill. Magazine of Art, Oct., 3 pp.
TERRA COTTA IN ARCHITECTURE, THE USE OF. W. Smith. American Builder, Oct.
WALL DECORATIONS IN ENGLAND. Painter's Mag., Oct., 2 pp.

Correspondence.

POLISHING SHELLS—IDENTIFYING JAPANESE VASES.

Editor of The Art Amateur:

SIR: You would oblige a subscriber by giving, if it would prove of sufficient interest to your readers, a method of removing the rough integuments adhering to certain shells and polishing them so as to exhibit the exquisite nacrious tints found on most shells with a rough exterior.

I have several vases purchased here by chance (price paid \$2.50 per pair) said to be Japanese. They are decorated, red and gold, on a hard white enamel ground, covered with flowers of a warm red (and a laky one) and bright green leaves. There are also branches of pine with spiky leaves. The painting seems similar to that of "faïence cloisonné," that is, each color is circumscribed by a dark line and appears slightly raised or convex. I send you rough pen-and-ink sketches of the form and the factory marks, and shall be much obliged if you will tell me what were they are.

ED. LIVINGSTON, New Orleans, La.

ANSWER.—The first operation in polishing shells is to remove the outside irregular crust with a knife, a file, sand-paper, or any other convenient means. This crust once taken off and a comparatively smooth surface obtained, finer sand-paper may be used, and after that emery powder and water or rotten-stone. The finishing touch is given with putty powder rubbed on with a cork.

The Japanese vases are of Hizen porcelain, and the inscription indicates the name of their maker to be Fka-Wa. Confusion of names sometimes occurs in classifying Japanese porcelains, from the fact that the three names, Hizen, Arita, and Tmari, are indiscriminately applied to the same ware. Hizen is the name of the province; Arita is the place where most of the potteries are; and Tmari is the port or principal warehouse of the ware. The Arita factories were started in 1510 by Goradayu Schansui, who learned the art in China, and was the first Japanese who made the "Somet-zukè," or true blue and white.

A RASH UNDERTAKING.

Editor of the Art Amateur:

SIR: Would it pay me to design a set of plates and have them published at my expense? W., Philadelphia.

ANSWER.—The samples you send us are creditable, but there is not the least probability that you would be able to publish them profitably at your own expense.

PLASTER CASTS FROM LIFE.

Editor of The Art Amateur:

SIR: Please inform me how to proceed to take a cast in plaster from some living object. STELLA, Troy, N. Y.

ANSWER.—Put about a pint of water in a basin, dye it with a color powder (any color will do), and then strew in the plaster with one hand, stirring evenly with the other. When the mixture has about the consistency of thick cream it is ready to work with. Have the hand or foot well oiled to prevent the plaster from adhering to it, place it in the position desired, and pour the mixture over it evenly. When the plaster is crisp take out the hand or foot. Give the mould thus formed a thorough oiling with a soft brush, and then pour in white plaster, mixed in the same way as before, except that the color is of course omitted. When the cast is hardened chisel off the mould with care. The most charming models are babies' hands and feet.

Pretty colored satin puckered napkin-rings, on white elastic about an inch or so in width, are very easy to make and very ornamental when made. The circumference should be six inches. Cut the elastic to this length, stretch it out, sew on the colored ribbons (which should be an inch wider) along each edge of the elastic, then allow it to relax. The satin will thus look puffed. Join it into a ring, and add a dainty little bow to hide the joining. Members of the same family could each have their own special color. Another way of making these rings is to cover a piece of cardboard about two inches broad with a piece of rich-looking colored velvet, embroider the edge with a design in gold-colored fillole, and add stars of the same at distances. A little piece of silk should line the ring before it is joined. Gold perforated cardboard looks well lined with a color, with a button-holed edge of thick silk or shaded wool.

Children's balls are now in great vogue in France. The latest novelty for them is the ribbon dance. Eight ribbons of different colors are attached to a ring in the ceiling. Four girls and four boys hold the ends of the ribbons. The orchestra strikes up, and the eight children dance a measure which enables them to plait the ribbons. The orchestra then starts another measure, the children another step, and the plait is unplaited. Each of the dancers may be dressed according to the color of the ribbon that he or she holds, and the mingling of the colors will be all the more brilliant. The idea might be easily taken for a cotillion figure.

Several Book Reviews and Answers to Correspondents are unavoidably crowded out of this number.